DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 449 463 CS 014 190

AUTHOR Armitage, Wendy
TITLE Using Phonics To Read: Does It Work or Not?
PUB DATE 2000-10-00
NOTE 7p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; Elementary Education; Instructional Effectiveness; Literature Reviews; *Phonics; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Skills
IDENTIFIERS Reading Theories

ABSTRACT

Many articles exist dealing with reading instruction and the current debate between phonics and whole language reading programs. A review of the literature indicates that most journal articles are in favor of teaching phonics along with other methods. There are many different opinions about whether phonics helps students learn to read, if it is a good approach, and how it may be implemented in the classroom. Phonics provides just one more method for teachers to use in the classroom to help students succeed in learning how to read. (EF)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

CS

ED 449 463

Using Phonics to Read: Does it Work or Not?

By
Wendy Armitage

Dominican University of California
School of Education
San Rafael, CA
October 2000

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
W. Armitage
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CS 014 190

Using Phonics to Read: Does it Work or Not?

Introduction:

I have volunteered in a first and a second grade class in the past, and I am currently helping out two days a week in another first grade class. I have noticed that the teachers each have their own styles of teaching reading, but each of them break reading up by teaching the sounds of the words, consonant blends, digraphs, and sounding words out. This method of breaking the words into its sounds appears to help the students decode the words and read the passage, but sometimes it does not seem as though it is helping the student. I am left wondering how students learn to read, and if phonics is a viable method to use to teach the students the strategies necessary to learn how to read?

Statement of Problem:

Does phonics involving letter-sound relationships, word identification, and basic patterns of spelling help students learn how to read? Is phonics instruction a more useful tool than a whole language program?

Literature Review:

The following review addresses the debates in reading instruction, an historical perspective on the issue of phonics, and teaching techniques. The articles also address the issue of whole language instruction versus phonics instruction in the classroom.

Debates:

Lundstrom (Hire Wire Act) discusses the reading instruction method, which involves both phonics and whole language instruction, used at Kent Elementary School in Carmel, New York. Lundstrom's article discusses the uses of phonics in the class, but it also addresses the debate on phonics and whole language instruction.

Manzo (Reading Panel Urges Phonics for all in K-6) is in favor of phonics instruction in the classroom. The author includes a section on what is necessary in order to provide successful phonics instruction.

Roller (Phonics Alone is No Cure-All) presents some interesting information for and against current phonics instruction. This article identifies that phonics use to improve reading is not the problem. However, teachers rely to heavily on phonics in their programs. Roller discusses the need for teaching letter-sound relationships and contextual reading.

Farstrup (Reading is More Than Phonics) makes the point that successful reading instruction is more than just phonics based. Too many programs focus too heavily on the letter-sound relations.

Implementation Methods:

Demoulin (1999) wrote an article, *Helping Children Learn to Read,* that provided the reader with a little historical perspective, issues on the debate over phonics instruction, and ways to implement phonics into a program.

Joseph (2000) wrote an article on the subject of developing first grader's phonemic awareness, word identification and spelling, while comparing two phonic instructional approaches.

Blevin (Blending Boosters) provides techniques and activities to enliven phonics lessons.

Phonics provides a foundation for students learning to read, because once a child learns the relationship between letters and sounds in the "alphabetic code, he or she can read by sounding out each of the words—a process called decoding" (Demoulin & Loye,

©1999, p.40). The downfall with phonics is that it can become a "drill-and-kill" method where "children become robotic in their reading approach" (Demoulin & Loye, ©1999, p. 41). Other critics of phonics instruction believe the emphasis on decoding will turn children off to reading, or it will take away from their comprehension of the material. The debate on the value of phonics in classroom as an instructional method used to teach reading will continue, but "no single method or tactic can achieve the goal of creating successful readers," so educators need to create a balance of those available teaching resources that will work best for the student's learning to read (Farstrup, ©Sunday, May 21, 2000).

Teachers who plan to use phonics in the classroom need to be trained to teach phonics in an imaginative and enjoyable way, and must adjust their instructional techniques to suit the various needs of the students. Phonics instruction involves lessons that "facilitate the linkages between the student's phonemic awareness, word identification, and spelling" (Joseph, 2000, p. 160). The instruction of a phonics skill can be taught as an entire class, which will lead into a class, or small group activity. It is important to not only focus on phonics, but to integrate phonics instruction into the language arts curriculum.

Summary:

There are many articles dealing with reading instruction on the current debate between phonics and the whole language reading programs. Most of the journal articles are in favor of teaching phonics along with other methods, since "good reading instruction involves much more than phonics, even though it is an important element early in the learning to read process" (Farstrup, Sunday, May 21, 2000).

Implications:

There are many different opinions whether phonics helps students learn how to read, if it is a "good" approach, and how to implement phonics instruction into the classroom. I am personally in favor of using phonics as one tool to help students learn to read. Not all children learn to read in the same manner, there is no problem with having as many methods as possible in place to support children's learning. A teacher should not focus only on phonics. Phonics should be used as a tool that students could use to decode words in the early stages of reading. I would teach a phonics skill to the students during either a whole group lesson, or at a center. Once the students have learned the phonics skill they would read a short story using their new skills. Individual or small group work would include writing, reading and listening activities that focus on skills or words that the students would be learning and could apply the phonics skill to aid their learning process.

There are no right or wrong answers on the debate of phonics. Does phonics help children learn how to read? Some of the students benefit from phonics instruction just like some students benefit from visual aids. Every person has a unique way of learning. Phonics provides just one more method for teachers to use in the classroom to help students succeed in learning how to read.

References

Blevins, Wiley. 1999I. Blending Boosters: Techniques and Activities to Enliven Phonics Lessons. Instructor. Vol. 108, No. 5, p. 20.

Demoulin, Donald and Loye, Robert David. Fall 1999. Helping Children Learn to Read. Education. Vol. 120, No. 1, pp. 40-43.

Farstrup, Alan. Sunday, May 21, 2000. Reading Is More Than Phonics. Tallahassee Democrat.

Joseph, Laurice. Winter 2000. A Comparison of Two Contemporary Phonic Instructional Approaches. Reading Research and Instruction. Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 160-169.

Manzo, Kathleen and Coles, Adrienne. April 19, 2000. Reading Panel urges Phonics for all in K-6. Education Weekly. Vol. 19, No. 32, pp. 1, 14.

Lundstrom, Meg. 1999. High-Wire Act. Instructor. Vol. 109, No. 8, pp.21-24.

Moran, Kathleen and Cobb, Suzanne. Spring 1999. Teacher Perception of CHARL-L Intensive Phonics. Reading Improvement. Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 2-3.

Roller, Cathy. May 17, 2000. Phonics Alone Is No Cure-All. USA Today.